

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OES-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 L-03 H-02 HEW-02 AID-05

SS-15 NSC-05 (ISO) W

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P R 202228Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2093

INFO AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 SAN JOSE 4930

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: TBIO,CS

SUBJECT: CONTROVERSY OVER VACCINATIONS BY THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

1. SUMMARY. THE DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING (ICMRT) CAME TO THE EMBASSY REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN A CONTROVERSY CURRENTLY EMBROILING THE CENTER. THE ICMRT, WHOLLY FUNDED BY LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY (LSU) WITH SOME USG SUPPORT, HAS BEEN OPERATING IN COSTARICA FOR FOURTEEN YEARS PERFORMING BASIC RESEARCH IN EPIDEMIOLOGY AND TROPICAL MEDICINE. RECENTLY, IT HAS COME UNDER ATTACK BY SOME MEMBERS OF THE COSTA RICAN MEDICAL PROFESSION FOR ALLEGEDLY USING COSTA RICAN CHILDREN AS "GUINEA PIGS" IN EXPERIMENTS WITH AN UNTESTED ANTI-FLU VACCINE. THE MINISTER OF HEALTH HAS ORDERED A HALT TO THE VACCINATIONS AND HAS INITIATED AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTER. THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IS ALSO CONCERNED. LSU'S REACTION TO THE LOCAL BROUHAHA MAY GENERATE CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST. END SUMMARY.

2. THE DIRECTOR OF ICMRT, DR. VICTOR M. VILLAREJOS, A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BOLIVIAN NATIONAL, CAME TO THE EMBASSY ON NOVEMBER 18,

TO EXPLAIN AND DEFEND THE CENTER AGAINST CURRENT CHARGES
OF USING AN UNTESTED FLU VACCINE, ADJU-FLUAX NO 10#35
MANUFACTURED BY MERCKH SHARP & FVHME, ON COSTA RICAN

SCHOOLCHILDREN WITHOUT MINISTRY OF HEALTH AUTHORIZATION

AND TO ASK FOR EMBASSY ASSISTANCE. IN A MEETING WITH
THE DCM AND OTHER EMBOFFS, HE STATED THAT THE CENTER WAS
ESTABLISHED BY A CONTRACT-LAW BETWEEN THE GOCR AND LSU
IN 1961. USING FUNDS FROM LSU, WHICH HE SAYS INCLUDE
GRANT MONIES GIVEN TO LSU BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
HEALTH AND THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, THE CENTER HAS
OVER THE PAST FOURTEEN YEARS ACCOMPLISHED SIGNIFICANT
RESEARCH IN EPIDEMIOLOGY AND TROPICAL MEDICINE.
DR. VILLAREJOS SPOKE PROUDLY OF ITS MOST RECENT ACHIEVE-
MENT, THE DISCOVERY THAT SERUM HEPATITIS CAN BE TRANS-
MITTED THROUGH SALIVA.

3. DR. VILLAREJOS ADDED THAT THE ICMRT IS RENOWNED
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD MEDICAL RESEARCH COMMUNITY FOR THE
QUALITY OF ITS WORK AND FOR THE CALIBER AND RESPONSIBILI-
TY OF ITS STAFF.

4. DR. VILLAREJOS, WHO HAS BEEN FULL-TIME DIRECTOR OF
THE CENTER SINCE 1966, IS A FULL-TENURED FACULTY MEMBER
OF LSU.

5. DR. VILLAREJOS BELIEVES THAT THE ATTACKS ON ICMRT

ACCUSING IT OF EXPERIMENTING ON COSTA RICAN CHILDREN
ARE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED. DR. ALFONSO TREJOS WILLIS,
A FACULTY MEMBER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF COSTA RICA AND
THE SPONSOR OF THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE ICMRT IS,
ACCORDING TO DR. VILLAREJOS, A COMMUNIST. IN DR. VIL-
LAREJOS' JUDGMENT, DR. TREJOS WAS RELIEVED OF PREVIOUS
JOB AS A MEDICAL SCHOOL RESEARCHER IN EL SALVADOR AND
WAS DENIED RENEWAL OF A CONTRACT WITH THE WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION IN BUENOS AIRES BECAUSE OF HIS LEFTIST
ACTIVITIES. IT WAS THE ACCUSATION BY DR. TREJOS THAT
LED THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH TO STOP THE VACCINATION PRO-
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GRAM.

6. DR. VILLAREJOS ALSO BELIEVES THAT DR. LEONARDO MATA,
A CLOSE ADVISER TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH, AND PRESENTLY
DIRECTOR OF THE COSTA RICAN INSTITUTE OF HEALTH INVESTI-
GATION, IS THE REAL INSTIGATOR OF THE WHOLE AFFAIR AND
IS TRYING TO USE THE CONTROVERSY TO FORCE THE GOVERNMENT
TO PUT ICMRT UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF THE HEALTH INVESTI-

GATION INSTITUTE. SUPPOSEDLY, MATA BELIEVES THAT THIS STEP WOULD ALLOW THE HEALTH INVESTIGATION INSTITUTE TO STOP THE LSU FUNDS FLOWING INTO ICMRT. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO DR. VILLAREJOS, THIS IS AN ILLUSORY BELIEF SINCE ANY SUCH ACTION BY THE GOVERNMENT WOULD CAUSE THE CENTER TO PICK UP AND MOVE OUT OF COSTA RICA (PROBABLY TO HONDURAS).

7. IN DEFENDING THE CENTER, DR. VILLAREJOS STATED THAT THE CENTER HAS PERMISSION FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH TO ADMINISTER THE VACCINE; THAT THE VACCINE WAS USED

LAST YEAR BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH ITSELF; AND THAT THE VACCINE IS NOT AN EXPERIMENTAL PRODUCT BUT, RATHER, ONE SOLD COMMERCIALY.

8. DR. VILLAREJOS EXPLAINED TO US THAT HE INTENDS TO GIVE MORE PUBLICITY TO THE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTER AND TO THE FACTS BEHIND THE ANTI-FLU VACCINATION EFFORT. AT THE SAME TIME, THE SUB-DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER, DR. ANTONIO IENA CHAVARRIA, AND OTHER RESPECTED

COSTA RICAN MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS, INCLUDING DR. RODRIGO

ZELEDON, HEAD OF CONICIT, WILL APPROACH PRESIDENT ODUBER WITH AN EXPLANATION OF THE FACTS BEHIND THE CENTER AND ITS ACTIVITIES. DR. VILLAREJOS HOPES THAT, AS A RESULT, THE PRESIDENT WILL ORDER A STOP TO THE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED ATTACKS ON THE CENTER.

9. IN COMING TO THE EMBASSY, DR. VILLAREJOS HOPED TO PERSUADE THE AMBASSADOR TO MENTION DISCREETLY TO THE

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OES-03 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 L-03 H-02 HEW-02 AID-05

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P R 202228Z NOV 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2094
INFO AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

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PRESIDENT THAT ATTACKS ON THE ICMRT WERE UNFORTUNATE AND WOULD PROBABLY CAUSE THE CENTER TO LEAVE COSTA RICA. HE FELT THAT THE AMBASSADOR'S ACTION WOULD SWAY PRESIDENT ODUBER TOWARD STOPPING THE ATTACKS. WE EXPLAINED TO DR. VILLAREJOS THAT IT WOULD BE PREMATURE IF NOT COUNTERPRODUCTIVE FOR THE EMBASSY TO BRING THE MATTER UP WITH PRESIDENT ODUBER AT THIS TIME. ANY APPROACH ON OUR PART MIGHT ONLY FUEL THE CONTROVERSY AND STRENGTHEN THE HAND OF TREJOS AND COMPANY. WE ALSO EMPHASIZED THE NEED AND GREATER PROBABILITIES OF SUCCESS OF A LOCAL CAMPAIGN BY COSTA RICAN PROFESSIONALS

ON BEHALF OF THE CENTER.

10. ALTHOUGH DISAPPOINTED, DR. VILLAREJOS ACCEPTED OUR POINT OF VIEW AND OUR SUGGESTIONS THAT PUBLICITY AND APPROACH TO THE PRESIDENT AND GOCR BY COSTA RICAN MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS WAS THE BEST STRATEGY UNDER THE

CIRCUMSTANCES.

11. FINALLY, DR. VILLAREJOS STATED THAT HE HAS BEEN IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH HIS COLLEAGUES AT LSU AND WITH THE FOUNDER AND EX-DIRECTOR OF THE ICMRT, DR. WILLIAM FRYE, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NOW RETIRED. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT LSU'S AND DR. FRYE'S PROPRIETARY INTEREST IN THE CENTER MAY LEAD TO REQUESTS FOR CONOFFS ONAL ASSISTANCE, AND, CONSE-

QUENTLY, FOR STATE DEPARTMENT PRESSURE ON THE COSTA RICAN GOVERNMENT. WE BELIEVE THAT GIVEN THE SENSITIVITY OF THE CHARGES, WHICH ARE BASICALLY THAT COSTA RICAN CITIZENS ARE BEING USED AS GUINEA PIGS BY A FOREIGN INSTITUTION, ANY USG INTERVENTION IN THE AFFAIR MUST BE VERY CAREFULLY CONSIDERED. THIS IS ESPECIALLY SO SINCE AMX REVELATION THAT USG (AND PARTICULARLY U.S. ARMY) FUNDS ARE FINANCING THE VACCINATIONS WOULD HAVE A DECIDEDLY ADVERSE IMPACT IN COSTA RICA.
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